

**"a new
NTEU"**



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A New NTEU

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A new NTEU pledges to tackle issues that workers with disabilities face, including the health and safety risks posed by COVID-19 and a develop a plan of action that responds to the catastrophic failures of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

Almost one in five Australians have a disability¹ and experience high levels of social inequality, often as a result of exclusion from the workforce. Industrial protections in law for people with disability are poor and it is widely acknowledged that the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* fails to address systemic employment discrimination against workers with disabilities. Universities remain ableist institutions due to the issues we all face - job insecurity, casualisation, increasing workloads.

COVID-19 and Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S)

COVID-19 is a significant safety risk for all students and workers in higher education: it can result in work-related injury, death and/or disability. COVID-19 has truly shone a light on just how strongly our union needs to develop strong networks of OH&S representatives.

Our vision for action on COVID-19 safety includes massively scaling up the union's activities in OH&S by developing robust networks of trained members as OH&S representatives. Together, we will campaign on COVID-19 safety in ways that encourage the use of our ability to walk off work in unsafe environments under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (2004)*.

Support the NTEU's network for people with disability

Workers with disabilities need a strong, collective voice within the NTEU's structures and should be able to have meaningful input into our union's policies and planning. We want to resource and provide administrative support to the NTEU Disability Rights Network and work collaboratively to support and consult with this group.

¹ Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, '[People with Disability in Australia in 2019: in brief](#)'.

Accessible workplaces

While accessibility is so much more than ramps and physical access, many university campuses have buildings and infrastructure which are inaccessible. It is a travesty that many workers and students still cannot physically access their own universities because buildings are constructed without proper accessibility consultation.

We will campaign against cuts to professional staff in disability liaison and inclusion roles that provide essential support to students. We want to see these areas adequately resourced and access to support for staff.

Addressing disability discrimination

Australia is ranked 21st out of 29 OECD countries in the employment participation of people with disability and about half of people with disability in Australia are excluded from the workforce.² To address this, we believe that universities should be treated like public institutions, and therefore have the responsibility to adopt strategies for the recruitment and retention of more people with disabilities, ideally maintaining 15% of the workforce as people with disability. This is an expectation of other public institutions, such as parts of the public service, and should apply to universities.

Flexible working and arrangements and leave

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, but a request by a worker can be refused if it would impose “unjustifiable hardship” on the employer. The number of workers who are likely to be in insecure, non-ongoing and precarious employment means they are less likely to negotiate flexible working arrangements, request reasonable adjustments and have no leave entitlements for disability-related health needs. Workers should be able to request reasonable adjustments, and when management refuses requests, workers should be supported by their union, including through campaigns.

Approach to Federal Government policies affecting workers with disability

Alongside campaigns advocating for better conditions in the workplace, workers with disability in our sector often also rely on social security payments to supplement their income if they are under- or insecurely employed at universities. A New NTEU will advocate for an increase in the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Newstart to provide a living wage for people with disability that is above the poverty line and call for abolition of ‘Work for the Dole’ schemes and punitive mutual obligations.

Hardship membership fees

A New NTEU intends to introduce equitable membership fees to workers in the sector who cannot afford the current membership fees, or have no protections when they fall under hard times and experience other financial stress burdens. This recognises that the union can also do more to ease effects of government policy, which is not under union control, and centralise power

² PWC, [Disability expectations – Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia](#), November 2011.

in our members. This is also consistent with our policy on executive salaries matching the median salaries of average workers.

Awards and bargaining

We will also advocate for the complete abolition of wage assessment tools under the Supported Employment Services Award and the Supported Wage System. These wage systems see workers paid sub-minimum wages and assess workers' productivity against able-bodied metrics. EBAs in universities across the sector provide for some workers at universities to be paid under the Supported Wage System.



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